

The Art of Memory in Late Medieval Central Europe (Czech Lands, Hungary, Poland). By Lucie Doležalová, Farkas Gábor Kiss, and Rafał Wójcik. Budapest–Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016. 352 pp.

With this volume, the authors have begun to fill a gap in the scholarship on Central European medieval cultural history. One could list numerous reasons for this omission, among which perhaps the most important ones are the unfavorable judgement of the art of memory and the difficulty of uncovering new sources. Adopting approaches to the study of the art of memory which have emerged in the German and Italian speaking world (such as that of Johann Christoph Frh. von Aretin, Paolo Rossi, Frances Yates, and Sabine Heimann-Selbach), the authors have tried to collect and present the late medieval Bohemian, Hungarian, and Polish provenience or origin sources connected to the *artes memorativae*. As they emphasize several times, this research has remained a largely unexplored field in Central Europe, and they have taken only preliminary steps toward subsequent monographs and, above all, text editions.

In the introduction, editor-in-chief Gábor Farkas Kiss outlines the history of the scholarship on this topic. After a short definition of the *ars memorativa*, he enumerates antecedents from Antiquity (such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*) and then offers possible explanations as to why an unprecedented growth occurred in the popularity of treatises on the art of memory in the late Middle Ages. According to Kiss, the most important factors included the requirements of new and resurgent universities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rising significance of preaching (against either the Ottomans or other confessions), and last but not least, monastic devotion. These factors are continually revisited in the succeeding chapters.

The first chapter, “*Artes Memoriae* and the Memory Culture in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia and Moravia,” is the work of Lucie Doležalová. Taking into account the manuscripts containing treatises on the art of memory, Doležalová presents the most interesting texts in their context. Of course, many of these treatises pertain to the Hussite environment. The texts of Czech origin are mostly translations or compilations (such as Mattheus Beran’s memory treatise); these frequently survived as fragments or parts of larger works.

In the next chapter, Rafał Wójcik, whose dissertation discusses the printed treatise of Jan Szklarek, presents the late medieval mnemonic treatises in Poland. As in the Czech lands, *artes memorativae* in Poland first appeared in the university

environment, particularly in Kraków, and in the friaries of the Polish Observants. In disseminating the studies on the art of memory at the University of Kraków, foreign professors, the so-called “itinerant humanists” (such as Jacobus Publicius, Conrad Celtis, etc.) played leading roles. It is worth adding, like the Mendicant communities, these figures connected the entire Central European environment to the written culture in Italian and German speaking world. Furthermore, the Polish Observants created and modernized the art of memory, an apparently successful innovation, since traces of it can be identified later, for instance in nineteenth-century pedagogical treatises.

In the third chapter, Farkas Gábor Kiss introduces the reader to “The Art of Memory in Hungary at the Turn of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.” Kiss notes that, compared to Bohemia and Poland, fewer sources from the Middle Ages in Hungary survived the Ottoman attacks. Still, thanks to the political connections between Hungary and Poland (and principally the Jagiellonian contacts), several treatises or authors mentioned in the Polish environment can be considered Hungarian as well. Of course, the use of the art of memory as a learning method stands out in comparison to its other uses. Students used it to help them memorize grammatical rules, and preachers were able to learn sermons by heart more easily.

The chapters discussed above figure as prefaces to the text editions, which comprise more than half of the volume. Most of these are first editions are of these texts edited on the basis of a single extant source. Every text edition is headed by a short exordium about the source itself and its context. Unfortunately, there are only a few references in these three chapters to the texts in the Appendix, and the exordia sometimes contain references to the more detailed analyses in the chapters. More problematically, the chapters are to be read as articles in a series: for example, the volume overall is inconsistent in the citation and translation of Latin paragraphs and in summaries of the main theses. But aside from these formal inconsistencies, it might have been more useful had the original authors and their works been presented not simply in their regional contexts, but also chronologically and with some discussion of their methods. For example, the treatise of Magister Hainricus is discussed in every chapter because of its considerable influence in East Central Europe, but there are problems concerning the text itself, which is included in the Appendix. If there is only one manuscript and several printings containing inserted notes sometimes in Hungarian and sometimes in Slovak, why did the editor choose a printed version with only Hungarian notes? Conversely, why did the authors

of this volume dedicate several subchapters to the itinerant humanist Jacobus Publicius, but not include a text edition of his art of memory in the appendix? These choices seem accidental and unconsidered and, unfortunately, this affects the value of the entire volume.

This editorial unevenness notwithstanding, this publication will certainly attract great interest because of its intent and sources. The well-chosen examples and expressive illustrations at the end of the volume will acquaint the curious reader with the different methodologies of the art of memory. In delineating the East Central European sources on the *ars memorativa*, the authors have opened the door wider to research on this *ancilla* of late medieval rhetorical studies.

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